

Oswego, New York Cellular Tower Crushes Chief's Vehicle

It stretched for more than half the length of a football field, causing considerable damage but no injuries.

Within a matter of seconds Thursday morning, the cellular tower behind the Oswego Fire Department's eastside station went from being 165 feet tall to being 165 feet long.

Winds, in excess of 55 mph toppled the tower in an easterly direction; the fire chief's vehicle and a section of a fence were crushed.

There were no injuries, Chief Ed Geers reported.

Firefighters quickly cut off the power to the tower, Deputy Chief Mark McManus added. "Nobody got hurt, but it got the adrenaline pumping," he said.

The tower fell in the best possible spot, the chief said.

"It went east, across our back parking area and the top landed between two parked cars. As upset as I am that it fell on my vehicle, I am extremely glad that no one was hurt," Geers said.

If the tower went down in just about any other direction it could have crushed the firefighters' museum or it could have fallen on a large part of the fire station itself; if so, several people would have been injured and quite possibly killed, the chief added.

If the tower had gone to the west it would have crossed the entrance way to the Price Chopper grocery store's parking lot.

Cars go in and out of there frequently during the day, the chief said. Someone surely would have been killed or badly injured if the tower went that way, he said.

Firefighters said the tower collapse sounded like a large steel door being slammed shut.

"When I came to work today, this wasn't even on the top 200 list of things I thought might happen," McManus said.

A group of firefighters were in the office just before 11:05 a.m. when the tower went down, McManus said. The wind had picked up and sounded like a train, he said.

"We say a piece of roofing blow away," he said. "No one expected the tower to come down."

Firefighter Tom Smith "saw" the tower fall.

"I caught a glimpse of it going past the window out of the corner of my eye. I didn't really know what it was. I thought it was something off the roof," he said. "Then we heard the crash, and prayed no one got hurt."

The sound was hard to describe, McManus said. "It was almost like a large metal door slamming," he said.

"Maybe because of the noise the wind was making it muffled it in here," the chief added.

The top of the tower encroached about 10 to 15 feet onto the back yard of the Ford residence on East Fourth Street, damaging a small storage area.

No one was home at the time.

However, Lori Ford was at work - at Cakes Galore and More - just around the corner.

"It sounded like thunder, like the roof was coming off," explained Bob Bateman, owner of Cakes Galore. "We thought the roof of the business had blown off."

However, when they went out to look a passing motorist caught their attention as he gestured toward the fire station, Ford said.

"Everybody got lucky. It could have been worse," Bateman said. "It's lucky that it didn't hit the firefighters' museum, they have some rare antiques over there."

The tower made a big boom when it hit the ground they said.

"It was scary," Bateman admitted.

"We both jumped. It sounded like thunder, the worst thunder you could ever imagine. We didn't know what had happened," Ford added. "I looked to see what it had done to my back yard. It had a ways to go before it would have hit the house, but I was still like, 'oh, my God!'"

A piece of the tower's antenna remained lodged near the top of a tree in the Fords' back yard on Thursday afternoon.

Wind speeds were an estimated 55 to 60 mph about the time the tower fell. Wind speeds reached 85 mph shortly after noon.

The winds were in the 25 to 45 mph for most of the day, according to Bill Gregway, local observer for the National Weather Service.

There were a few times during the day the speeds jumped up to 55 to 60 mph, he noted.

On the west side of the city Thursday the winds rolled up a large section of the tin roof on Stone's Candies shop.

It sounded like someone was banging on the roof with a hammer, workers inside the store said.

A few more miles to the west a large pine tree was ripped apart by the wind and part of it fell on a garage along Route 104 in the Town of Oswego.

The winds also knocked out the sports dome on Route 481. Portions of the inflatable roof were pierced by the basketball backboards and other sports equipment.

All sorts of debris were being blown across city streets all day and evening.

Niagara Mohawk reports more than 8,000 Central New York customers are without power, roughly 3,000 of them in areas of Oswego County.

A rash of motor vehicle accidents, believed to be weather related, were reported around the county. One accident, on Route 264 in Schroepfel, killed a pregnant woman.



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